

Allegory of the Regionalist America

Though Osray hadn't detected the footsteps approaching the door, he heard the key turning in the lock and decided to play their game. The door opened wide and two men entered. They were dressed differently from the regular attendants.

"How nice of you to give us such a luxurious apartment. And just as I was about to get a bit lonely, you showed up. How wonderful. All this because you want to show us around your superb place. Ah, you know how to treat your guests with respect and dignity," Osray gushed.

He noticed that, while the two men listened to him, they didn't drop their guard. As they walked toward him, two more entered and went to Resman. One of the men kicked Resman to wake him. When he opened his eyes, Osray winked at him.

"Get up," one of the men told Resman, who was staring at Osray.

Osray was being handcuffed. He didn't understand why Resman was staring him. Resman held his arms out in front of him and waited his turn for the handcuffs. Osray didn't like it when he saw four more men at the door. One of the men in the room gave him a strong push, nearly knocking him over. He got the message and stepped toward the door.

Surrounded by the eight men, Resman and Osray were led from one homogenous, off-white corridor to another. All that time, Osray was silent, but his mind was working.

Finally they arrived at a white room with two iron chairs bolted to the floor, facing the wall opposite the door. Two feet behind the chairs was a metal bar studded with several unlit lightbulbs. The room's light source was on the same wall as the door; it cast their shadows before them on the other three bare walls and the floor in front of the chairs.

Osray studied the chairs carefully. *What would Resman do if he was me? He might denounce the birthplace of the new American constitution. A president—what's his name? He liked to sit in an armchair. Wasn't he assassinated while sitting on a chair like this?*

He laughed as though he found everything about the room funny. “How nice of you; you’re going to show us a free movie about the forging of the American constitution. Oh, I love movies. Resman, what type of film do you want to watch? A western? Maybe they’ve only got gangster movies. I like those too. Resman, are you going to tell them about their duties toward us? Remember the movies, too.” He kept laughing as he walked around the room, observing the movement of his shadow on the wall.

“Yes,” replied one of the agents. “We’ll make sure you don’t miss anything. We’ll start off by strapping your legs to the chair. And then to make you feel more comfortable, we’ll handcuff your arms behind the chair.”

“Gosh, all this, just for us. But haven’t you forgotten something? The popcorn!” Osray smiled, but he knew these agents were very dangerous. He tested the solidity of walls by kicking one softly with his foot.

“Don’t worry, they’re made of concrete and steel,” said one of the agents.

“Now you’re speaking my language. It might take much more than a huff and a puff to knock them down,” Osray said.

“At least you haven’t demanded your civil rights yet,” said an agent. He eyed Resman. “Your partner doesn’t say very much. Until now, he hasn’t said a word to us. And his face is a blank. Hey, you over there! Don’t you have anything to say about all this?”

Resman ignored the agent and moved away from the door to sit on one of the chairs. His silence frightened Osray. It *was* blank.

“Don’t worry about Resman. He knows that we can’t reason ourselves out of here. But I still think we could have a laugh, if you didn’t hide your humor behind those dark sunglasses. Let me help you remove them.” Smiling, Osray stepped toward one of the agents. The agent stretched his arm out and stopped Osray from coming any closer. Osray reacted immediately.

“He doesn’t want me to see his sunglasses,” he said in baby talk. “Wait and see; I’m gonna tell my mommy.”

Some of the agents suppressed quick smiles. Resman rose and climbed up on the chair to stand facing the agents. The agents backed away. “Careful, before you hurt yourself,” said one of the agents.

Osray didn’t like this at all. He observed their behavior keenly. Somehow he had to stop Resman from speaking. Desperate, he spoke without really thinking about what he was saying.

“At the fair, you were very cunning. I was watching you all along. You wanted to start a riot, but you couldn’t get the people behind you. Your plan still worked, though—you pretended to save us, trying to get us to trust you.

If you smile, we might trust you.” Osray hoped his behavior would signal to Resman that he had regained his mental powers.

“What Osray is saying is quite simple,” said Resman. “You should act on your highest principle. If your job prevents you from doing so, denounce it and do something else. Each person is responsible for himself. Your boss isn’t responsible for your actions.

“You’re performing one of the highest offices in your country. You should conduct yourselves professionally. Treat everyone you apprehend with dignity, respect, and humanity. You’re neither a judge nor an executioner. If we violate a law, don’t let it stick in your craw. A person may shoot at you while you’re performing your duties, and yet, that person holds nothing against you. His offence is against the state, not you personally.

“Using excess force to apprehend an offender makes you no better than the perpetrator. Let your professionalism glow with responsibility. Think of it this way—when you’re sick, you don’t want your doctor to bang you up as a penalty for not taking sufficient care of your health. It’s the same as apprehending a suspect. Perhaps he needs some respect. You’re his doctor, not his torturer.

“Remember, a suspected offender should be treated with common sense. When you do this, you’re performing your office professionally and with responsibility. When you act on your lowest credibility, you’re also conditioning your suspects to act on their vulgarities. If you shoot an unarmed suspect, or deliberately injure a suspect, the next suspect will see that he should defend himself against your disrespect. This will lead to chaos. You’re responsible for all of this. You also degrade your institution and colleagues whenever you behave like a four-legged animal. Your highest level of responsibility is principal. And never forget that each person has an innate self-preservation principle. It supercedes any civil or international laws.

“Your job puts you at very high risk. Don’t make it any worse by neglecting your integrity.”

Osray noticed that the agents readjusted their sunglasses and frowned, as if trying to figure out why they always kept their glasses on. “Let’s get on with it,” one of them said.

Osray and Resman sat quietly on the chairs as their legs and arms were bound. Osray hoped the agents were thinking about what Resman had said to them. They appeared to hate what they were doing, working in silence without acknowledging one another with looks or words.

“What are you doing behind us? Moving furniture or something?” asked Osray.

“Some people will be asking you some questions. They’ll be sitting right behind you. Unfortunately, you aren’t allowed to see their faces,” said an agent.

Osray glanced at Resman and then stared at the wall in front of him. He twisted his head back when he heard the door open, and he saw the agents leaving the room. Suddenly, the floodlights on the metal bar behind the chairs blazed. He squinted, but he couldn’t see anything. The lights were too painfully bright. He turned his head back and stared at their shadows on the wall.

“Those lights are bright enough to make us invisible. I have to practice that technique,” said Osray. He heard the door open again. Four shadows moved across the wall; they appeared to be male. They sat behind Osray and Resman’s chairs without blocking the light sources on the wall behind them.

Resman tried to stand, but his bonds prevented it. *Has he completely lost his survival instinct?* Osray groaned mentally when Resman spoke.

“Your leader is also responsible for your actions. Look at your political leaders very closely. With your federalist bombs, you kill and destroy to have things your way. You use military power and violence against other nations. You use terror and fear to bring your people into line. Listen to me, for I’m not blind—you’re responsible for your leaders’ designs, not just toward yourself and others like you. The way you live and work reveals a lot about how your institutions function in the world; it’s like a crumbling empire.

“I, Resman, am going to see your leader, because you have an awkward way of colonizing the world. Even if McGarvish controls your mind, you’re still responsible for your actions.”

Osray clenched his fists as silence fell in the room. He watched the shadows on the wall. Those behind them seemed to be communicating nonverbally.

“In that case, you don’t have to go very far,” one of the shadows behind them said. “We’re right here. We’re the new America. Yes, Resman, we’re upholding our responsibilities, and our mission is to save our country. The American people trust us. They rely on us. A single president can’t represent all of our interests. It’s taking us down the drain. Look how hard each person has to work, without seeing a cent. We’re one of the richest countries in the world, but each one of us is very poor. We don’t have anything. Where does all our money go?”

“You’re a bunch of worthless cowards,” Osray growled. “Why are you telling us all this? You’re a colony of filthy pigs, and I’m not scared of gutless pigs, moving around like shadowy swamp-dwellers. You can rot in your grubby hole. Where is that murderer?”

“He isn’t here,” said Resman.

“Oh, I feel so wild today; a new man,” said Osray.

“You, Resman, are our living spirit. You live without any fear; you embody our dream of the true America. You tell Americans about their highest responsibility toward their nation’s future. The truth about saving our great nation involves having many leaders to govern this powerful country. And you, Resman, have shown us the way.”

“I thought we were your friends. Is this how you treat friends?” Osray countered. “I still can’t figure out why you’ve bound us. And that light, it makes me angry. Let’s get one thing straight. We aren’t federalists. And I don’t care about what sort of government you have.” He laughed, then asked, “Who elected you?”

This time another stood and raised his hand. Osray followed the shadow closely, waiting for more movement, hoping to see the speaker’s mouth move. Finally he concentrated on the shadow on his left, and it started to move about. Then it spoke.

“I’m the leader of the Northeast Region of America. You have only strengthened the union that has bound us, up until now. A single centralized union can’t save this great country. Look at all our internal problems! There are many more poor people, all living worse than dogs. The homeless are becoming uncountable. Every American lives in fear and insecurity. The federal leader makes us paranoid. These problems shouldn’t exist in a great nation like ours. Our centralized government only lies to us. It controls mass media and threatens the people who want to speak out. It’s giving away all our jobs to foreign countries. The ordinary American works at several dead-end jobs just to stay alive. We don’t have any secure jobs, and no security in our own backyard.

“Our single government isn’t sensitive enough to our despair and poverty. It only breeds more social problems and criminals. No decent American can accept such hideous crimes anymore. The federalist president wants criminals. He uses this as a threat against any decent American, to suppress us. This is how the federalists tell us we’re needed. This won’t work anymore.

“Oh yes, a centralized government’s time is ticking away. We’re sick and tired of how an elected federalist president looks out for his own state. No

respectable American would accept this form of segregation today. Oh, no—we've been awakened. For America, there's only one way forward: no centralized government. Our civil war came about because of the notion that political and human rights reside with the people. We, the people, see that a single president can't represent our rights adequately. Now the people are only acting on their rights—the right to select a fully democratic government that can represent their rights. Our federal government doesn't represent the welfare of its people anymore. It's becoming more and more totalitarian as a few people want to retain all power for themselves."

When the speaker paused, Osray intervened. "You have to chain us down for this? If you're speaking the truth, I'll run—run as fast as I can. But your hogwash makes me happy."

"Some people from the Northeast Region elected me as their representative, to stand up for the rights and dignity of our people," replied the Northeast speaker. "Because of you and your friend, our dignified endeavor comes to light, and all Americans thank you."

Osray observed that the shadow next to the Northeast speaker was moving.

"I'm the elected representative of the Southern Region," said the next speaker. "Some of our advisors were murdered. But let me get to the point. Our current federalist government and its entire administration don't represent our American values anymore. It hasn't done anything for the people. We're poor; everyone already knows this. But look at how the government is wasting our natural resources. We don't have sufficient drinking water. It's just wasted. The federalists don't have a program in place to manage our future water supply. The government continues to destroy our forests. We need our forests to prevent erosion, to recycle the air, to remove carbon dioxide. Sometimes, when it's extremely dry, we need water for our agriculture. And we have a shortage.

"We live mostly from agriculture. Look at our soil. We're over-farming the topsoil for mass production. We're destroying the good soil. For what? Just to feed people in other countries. The worst part of it is, farmers don't see anything for their labors.

"In fifty years or so, our population's going to double. We'll need more houses and more roads. We're going to use up our farmland for all this. The crude reality is, how are we going to feed everybody? We can't allow the federalists to destroy everything. Soil needs hundreds of years to renew itself. Today, our tomatoes and apples taste the same, because of our mass production.

“The government doesn’t want anybody to know how quickly we’re destroying our resources, our farmland and forests. We have to conserve our nation’s natural resources. Natural resources aren’t only oil. Think about the air we breathe; the snow we roll up in our hands; sitting outside on a nice summer day. The horror will be the depletion of our quality of life.

“We don’t have to feed the world while we poison ourselves. Everything we eat today has been treated with chemical fertilizers and pesticides. We’re contaminating our drinking water with all these chemicals, too. The worst part of all this is that our industries are helping to destroy our own vegetation, our soil’s nutrition. We can’t always take more and more forests for farmland. We need some balance. This is possible when we remove the federalists who cry for more and more power to control us. We’re going to have regions ironing out some concrete solutions.

“Look at how we are wasting our energy. We don’t have to waste the main ingredient that adds value to our lives. We could be a lot smarter. In fifty years, we’re going to have a lot of energy problems in our country. The government doesn’t want us to use solar energy. But we have to seek an adequate alternative to oil. We don’t impress others by showing them how we waste our energy resources. In some states, they’re already having energy problems. We shouldn’t fall back on nuclear energy, because we won’t have an infinite supply of uranium. And the radioactive waste is very dangerous. Where are we going to throw the nuclear waste? This is what will happen: our food production will diminish. And water, too.

“Our unfaithful federalist government tries to keep us ignorant. It tells us that having a strong military presence in the world will secure our lives. This is a lie—it wants to destroy America, to make our home a wasteland. We can’t allow this.

“With our natural resources, we need the right America, not the federalist USA. The federalist government is giving us bigger ships for fishing, as though these ships will increase the ocean’s fish population. With what we don’t use each year, we could easily feed half the world. All these problems originate from our strong federalist doctrine of waste, of not recycling. The harsh reality is that, as our population increases, we’ll consume much more. Our philosophy is about how to consume intelligently, not wastefully.”

Osray noticed the speaker’s shadow move to gradually sit down, which seemed to indicate that he didn’t want to say anything more. Osray glanced at Resman, who seemed to be concentrating on the shadows on the wall and not showing any reaction to what the speakers were saying.

The shadow next to the most recent speaker moved. "I'm from the Midwest Region of America," he said.

Osray quickly interrupted him. "I've heard that voice before. Weren't you the one who said hello to us when we were at that Interstate motel several months ago?"

"Yes."

"You're a cool guy. With you around, I won't lock my front door. You still have three seconds to explain your behavior."

"No, Osray—don't do it!" cried Resman.

Osray gaped at him in surprise. "Resman, don't tell me we aren't on the same side."

"Young man, I'm no match for you. After living here, I lost my mental powers. But your boss didn't," said the speaker.

"My boss—Resman isn't my boss!"

"He didn't mean me, but McGarvish," Resman said. "They think we're McGarvish's spies. That's why they've bound us. And they wear dark glasses to block the gateway to their souls."

"You mean he's one of us?" Osray asked Resman, jerking his head toward the speaker behind them. "But he doesn't trust us. How do you know all this?"

"When I sensed objects flying around in your room, it confirmed my suspicions," said the speaker. "You didn't use your power to fight off our agents because you want to know more about our hideout."

"Wow, your hideout," Osray said softly, thinking that McGarvish could only scan surfaces. "I couldn't hide anything from you. You know my boss, McGarvish, very well, don't you?"

"No. He's a ruthless beast."

"Mr. Grant, you don't thrust us, and that's natural. I'm here to free the president from McGarvish. And Osray is here to kill McGarvish. We need your help," said Resman.

Osray gulped. "When I'm finished with McGarvish, you're next. Don't try to stop us!" he cried.

"Resman, you're right," said the speaker. "And if you don't control that boy, I see another McGarvish in the making. Before we destroy each other, you might as well know what we're fighting for. Saving our country is much more important than my own life."

"Thanks for having such confidence in me," Osray said sarcastically. Then he asked Resman, "Please allow me to continue."

"Ah, boy! Do you want me to put my hand in your mouth and pull out your heart?" Osray protested.

“Please allow me to continue,” said the speaker. “I ask every American to look at what we’re doing to ourselves internationally. People from other countries hate us. Nobody trusts us anymore. Not because we’re too arrogant, but because the federalists paint us as hypocrites. Our lying president tells us that we’re morally obligated to make the world truly democratic, especially independent nations. But whenever we enter another country to overthrow a dictator, we just replace him with another one. Democracy is in the melting pot.

“Look at what we’ve been doing over the years. We give away billions to buy friendship and partners while at home, none of us trusts our neighbors. We see each other as potential criminals. We also give away billions to covert operations. We pay people to commit terrorist acts against legitimate governments. Now, most of these groups are well-known terrorists wanting to repay us—waiting to kill Americans. So, this is how these people return the favor. Because of our injustice, the federalists create an invincible enemy—terrorists. We really know how to live in fear because each of us is seen as a potential terrorist according to our politicians.

“Other countries are just laughing at us because at home we cry ‘make the world free’ while we’re making ourselves its victims. We’re blind to our own totalitarian government. We’re ashamed to accept it, aren’t we. If foreigners called our government totalitarian, we’d bomb the crap out of them. Our government nourishes our inflated ego by deceiving us.

“Are we really free? It’s humiliating, how we must pass through countless security checks as though we’re terrorists in our own country. We live in so much fear! Fear of our own people, Americans like ourselves. This isn’t normal. The root of most American problems is our totalitarian lord—the Machiavellian Prince. It makes me sick whenever I think about how our president is abusing the people’s blind trust.”

Silence fell and lasted for a few seconds. Then the shadow next to the speaker cleared his throat. *That must be a representative of the Eastern Region of the States*, Osray thought; *he’s the only one who hasn’t yet spoken.*

“I’m from the Eastern region,” the new speaker said, confirming Osray’s deduction. “We could speak all day about our president leading us to disaster. But the American people are behind us. And we’re for them—our land and our dignity. Our new government will look like this: Each region will elect two representatives. And the presidency will be rotated every two years. In this way, each region will have one of its representatives as the president for two years. While that person is president for only a two-year period, the other

seven members will take up important offices, such as external affairs, internal affairs, and so on. Mind you, these eight elected people can't run again for office; the next eight must be new. In this way, we'd have fairness and justice. We'll be working for our people. How else can there be hope and prosperity in this great land?"

Osray interrupted the speaker. "How do you intend to bring about this change? Do you think the current president will allow you to do all this without a fight?" He laughed.

"No region is against another. There'll be no violence. Absolutely none. Now, the government is using missionaries against us. And it doesn't want to relinquish its power. Well, all I want to say is, though your life is in danger, we'll put ours in greater danger."

"You've a nice way of saying that we're your prisoners," said Osray. "Are you going to justify your actions against us by saying we know too much?" He laughed and then added, "I don't know how else to tell you that we aren't staying here for long." He stopped speaking as they watched the shadows disappearing one after another. The lights went out behind them.

Resman seemed to wake from his meditation.

"Do you think I scared them?" Osray asked, but Resman ignored him. Osray persisted. "Maybe I came on too strong for them."

The heavy silence in the room was becoming unbearable for Osray. "Don't worry, we aren't their prisoners," he said. "They want you to work for them. But you can't do that."

Resman didn't seem to be listening.

Suddenly the door opened and two agents entered without sunglasses over their eyes. "You're free to go," one of them said.

"Did you hear that, Resman? We're free!" Osray joyfully sang out.

The two agents removed their handcuffs. Resman rose and walked around the room. Osray confronted the two agents. "Hey, wait a minute! What kind of game are you playing on us? What's the catch?"

"There's a car outside waiting for you," said one agent.

"I get it—you wired the car with explosives. *Boom*—we're dead."

"Will you go before I change my mind?" said the agent in exasperation.

Resman walked to the door and waited for Osray, who was still very suspicious of the agents' motive. Resman pushed the door fully open and stepped through it, then took a few steps away from the door. Osray rushed to the door to keep Resman in sight.

The agents led the way out of the underground facility, and then the barn-like building on the surface. A dark green car was parked outside. Without

asking any questions, Resman climbed into the front passenger seat. Osray was still questioning the two agents. Finally he got behind the steering wheel and started the engine. He threw the car into Drive and drove along the unpaved road that ran across the field.

“We’ve only half a tank,” Osray observed.

“We have to see the president,” said Resman.

Osray looked around at the great open area around him. When he arrived at the main road, Osray turned in the direction that led away from the fair. After several minutes, he reached an intersection with roads going east and west. Osray hesitated. He believed that the regionalist agents thought they would drive east. So he turned west.

“We’re in a hole. It might take longer than I thought before we hit the Interstate,” Osray informed Resman. “Where do you know Grant from?”

Resman appeared to be lost within himself. “McGarvish killed his family. And he thinks that McGarvish controls our minds.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes.”

“Why haven’t we confronted McGarvish yet?”

“McGarvish is a slaughterer. Now, I’m tired of your manner.”

Osray turned on the radio, and it kept him occupied for several hours. Suddenly the car’s engine sputtered, then died. “How do you like this? We’re out of gas already! Those agents really know how to keep us within their range,” said Osray.

Resman climbed out of the car and continued on foot. Osray looked after him in amazement. He’d been about to ask him to stay in the car while he went to look for some gas. *I might as well keep up with him, he thought, before something worse happens. We’re in the middle of nowhere. At least nobody is shooting at us.* Osray trotted after Resman, and quickly closed the gap between them.

“Did you notice anything special about those trees yonder?” asked Resman.

“Nothing; they’re too far away. What do you expect me to see?”

“From their regularity, it seems as though they were planted. This means that there might be people living nearby.”

“You saw all that, Resman? At least, for once, I’m sure about where we’re going.” Osray looked around. “This is really a deserted road. Not even an insect using it.”

After a half-hour of walking, they came to a narrow road leading toward the trees. As the details of the trees became more distinct, Osray saw a huge

white house among them. It reminded him of a well-known architectural site, although he couldn't place which one. Resman started walking much faster. This scared Osray; he'd have preferred to approach with more caution. He'd initially thought that the car had contained sufficient gas to bring them to this address, but now he thought the agents were playing a malevolent game with them.

The road led to a wide iron gate. A notice said *Beware of dogs! No trespassing!* Osray stopped and studied the five-foot, solid white fence that stretched like a fortification around the house. Resman pushed on the metal gate a few times, trying to force it open.

"I've a bad feeling about this place," murmured Osray, and continued grumbling about dangerous dogs, but Resman didn't share his idea.

"Can't you see all those signs of habitation? A keen gardener recently trimmed the grass. Look how smoothly the fountain is spewing silvery sprays of water into the pool. The rose bushes are well-tended; their beauty cries out that love is in the air. Love is an eternal blessing. Come, let's wash off the dirt of life. That clear water breathes new life into my soul," said Resman.

"What about those statues on the front lawn? You didn't have anything to say about those," said Osray, then warned, "There are furious dogs in there. They could rip us to pieces in a second.

"Yes, you might be right. They're likely responsible for protecting that house and everything within this wall. But I'm still going in, Osray."

"Resman, you just said that the dogs know their responsibility. So there's no need to have them to display their duties toward their master," Osray tried, kicking the fence a few times in frustration.

Resman ignored him and studied the wall. "We have to jump over, but it's too high for me. I really don't understand why they have to build a five-foot fence for dogs."

"They need this fence to stop the dogs from running off into the wild," Osray replied sarcastically, watching Resman scale the gate, then slip and fall from the top of it.

"I've got the answer," Resman said, rising and dusting himself off. "My dear friend, even when someone's front lawn and side yards are well kept, the back yard could be like a jungle. Let's hurry to the back. You'll see what I mean!"

Osray followed him to the back of the property. Sure enough, at the back, the pool was nearly obscured by long grass and overgrown gardens. The wooden back fence cracked when Resman pushed on it, and a few pickets fell

off, revealing a wood ant nest. Osray hefted a picket and imagined it was a sword that he swung about as though he was defending himself from deadly carnivores. He didn't notice Resman stepping through the opening in the fence into the yard. When he did, he cried out, "Resman, guard dogs are vicious; we're no match for them. And darn, but this place smells like dogs." Osray wrinkled his nose and looked around for the source of the smell. "They use these bushes as their latrine. And look at these pieces of wood lying about. They look all chewed up. This must be the dogs' favorite place." Osray started sweating and looked around nervously.

"I don't know what you've got against dogs," Resman said. "If some dogs run up to us, keep on walking. Don't show any fear. Act as though you belong here. Remember, don't stare at them, just ignore their curiosity. Don't try to touch them. And if that doesn't work, we should run for the pool and wash away our scent."

"And then what?" Osray asked doubtfully. "Just knock on the door?"

"Or we could stay in the water until someone discovers us."

Osray didn't tell Resman that he'd been bitten by a dog when he was a child. He stayed close behind Resman for protection, and kept a sharp lookout for any unusual movements. "I don't like any of those ideas, Resman," he said as they headed toward the house. "There are corrupt people behind closed doors. And I don't want to be a sitting duck in the pool if I have to stay in the water because of the dogs."

As they approached the pool, Osray's senses sharpened, and he scanned their vicinity for dogs. His fear overcame him and he overtook Resman, then jumped into the pool. Resman followed him. Feeling much safer in the water, Osray didn't notice a ravishing young blonde woman clad in a bikini until she came to the shallow end of the pool and stared at them.

"You're trespassing," she said in a sultry voice. She looked at them without fear. "This is private property."

Osray turned his attention on her, and her appearance mesmerized him. His pupils enlarged and his facial muscles slackened until his mouth sagged open. "Who are you?" he stammered, noting with pleasure that she was more or less his age.

"Does it matter?" she purred. All this time she was moving gracefully toward Osray as though she too was mesmerized.

"Instead of a witch with razor-sharp teeth to strip us bare, an angel has come to rescue me," Osray sighed. "Your beauty is immeasurably rare. It intoxicates me. Your intelligence shines from your face, ensorceling me. It

makes me want to cry out my manliness.” She continued moving closer, as if charmed by his pleasant words.

“I’m Felix-Ed,” he said to her. Her eyes held Osray’s. He didn’t realize that he was also drifting toward her. “Your beauty is mystifying,” he whispered. “What a fortunate sailor I am. I’ve traveled a great distance to glimpse such rare beauty. I’ll dream of it forever. I’ll tell tales of your beauty and charm across the universe.”

Osray watched her moisten her lips with her tongue. They remained slightly, seductively, parted. Osray remained motionless in the pool, burning with desire. The water lapped around his nose, but he continued staring at her long blonde hair that floated like a golden fishing net on the surface of the water, glowing in the sunlight dancing upon it.

“Osray!” Resman shouted, awakening him from his romantic fantasies for a moment. But Osray was involuntarily slipping into the spell of her irresistible beauty. He moved toward her again as though moving through a dream. She glided into Osray’s arms without disturbing the silence of the water, and the water sealed them together.

Resman was muttering about true love, and seconds that seemed like an eternity. Osray ignored him. “They can’t do this forever,” Resman grumbled, and turned away from them and walked to the edge of the pool.

“Love. Tell me about it,” she whispered into Osray’s ear.

He put his lips to her ear and whispered, “Love is our dream. In it, we live eternally. I couldn’t live without my dream. Neither can you. We share each other equally. Nothing more or less. Our love is real, our dream is real. In love, we’re eternally happy. Our bodies float as one. Love is an eternal flame, melting away the differences between us, binding us forever.

“Love makes all the gods jealous. We’re living our eternal dream. Nothing can deny love. You can feel it in your toes, making your feet as light as a cloud. You can feel your feet floating. They’re so weightless. That love is moving upward. Yes...let it flow through you. You can feel it around your waist. Your waist is disappearing in the clouds...Oh, sweet love—love is such a wonderful feeling. It’s moving up to your chest, sitting like a goddess on your breast. Your heart is pumping out only love. It is flowing through your body. Let it flow. Yes, I can see it flowing. It’s rushing to your arms and neck. Your arms are so light and relaxed now...they’re becoming the clouds. Your face is touched by the sweetness of love. It is becoming more and more relaxed...you can feel the eternal smile on your face. Love is caressing your hair...Feel how magical and relaxed you are. You’re becoming more and more relaxed.

“Your whole body is being bathed in love. You can see yourself swimming in the cloud of love. Your eyes are becoming heavy... heavier and heavier... close them tightly. Let your whole body swim in the stream of love. We’re floating in love. In love, we can feel nothing else.”

Osray remained silent for a few seconds. Then he said, “If I can borrow your car, raise your right hand.” He heard Resman’s shocked gasp but remained focused on the woman. Her right hand rose gracefully into the air, and it stayed up. He looked at Resman and grinned, letting him know he’d remembered his mission: to speak to the president of the USA.

Resman stared in dawning admiration as Osray carried the young woman out of the pool and laid her in a shaded area next to the pool to sleep. He knelt there a moment, then reluctantly rose. He hated himself for what he was about to do. “Let’s get the car, Resman.”

“Yes, yes!” replied Resman. “Where is the car? I don’t see any car.”

“In the garage, over there,” Osray said, pointing to a low building beside the house.

They hurried into the garage and found a convertible parked inside, but its key wasn’t in the ignition. However, the van next to it had its key. They climbed in and Osray drove to the metal gate, which opened automatically and then closed behind them. They drove for a while without saying anything.

“Has the flame burned out, Osray?” Resman asked at last. “You know she’s a regionalist spy.”

“I don’t even know her name,” Osray murmured, feeling mentally and physically exhausted.

“I didn’t know that you were so romantic. You came very close to abandoning our mission.”

“Tell me, Resman: which comes first, love or responsibility?” Osray asked hesitantly.

“Why?” Resman passed his hand over his face.

“At the pool, everything started out with my duties toward you at the forefront of my mind. And before I realized it, I was mixing love into the equation. Love is much stronger than responsibility, isn’t it?”

“Osray, human beings are born with responsibility. Responsibility is a part of creation. As a matter of fact, the phrase ‘human beings’ should be replaced with ‘responsible beings.’ From responsibility, our attributes and identity emerge. Humans are responsible beings. ‘Responsible being’ is an entity, not an attribute. Because of this, you couldn’t step out of your own nature and experience love. As you can see, responsibility precedes love. If

I recollect correctly, you told her that love is like a flame binding two people together. Is that truly love? Truth and love—the truth about America and the love for it—is what the regionalists want.”

“Resman, there are several different levels of love. I feel as though I love her the way I love myself. This isn’t the same as loving my parents. Or sibling love. And a believer loves God for a different reason. I love her. I’m talking about love in itself. In a brief moment, I think I experienced pure love, Resman. That experience is so rare. I think a person might experience it once in a lifetime. I’m trying so hard to relive that experience now, but I can’t. And I can’t find the right words to talk about it.”

“I see,” said Resman. “I feel sorry for you. Next time, I hope you do much better than being a passive observer of love, beauty, and pure harmony. Be active, participate in it. Don’t try to remember the script of love or beauty, but be it. Muddy yourself in it.”

“Aren’t you going to ask me how it was?”

Resman gave him a quizzical look. “What are you talking about?”

“My experience of love.”

“No!”

“No? But I want to talk about it. How else would you understand my feelings?”

“I don’t want to hear about your feelings. You’ve forgotten one thing. Her feelings are much more important than yours. And one more thing—you can’t plant love. It doesn’t grow, only responsibility does.”

“I guess you don’t want to talk about love. What’s the matter? Were you once bitten by the love bug? Why are you so evasive?”

“You sound like a teenager,” Resman protested. “How can anybody be bitten by love? Earlier, you told me love is pure. People give up their lives for it. At least you’re lucky—you’ve found it through another person. I wonder whether you’ve ignited it in her, too? You should aim for an ideal relationship between two people—but we descend too quickly into carnal pleasure. You should have asked me whether or not I’m still in love.”

“Maybe you are. If I were castrated, I’d see her differently. But I’m not.” He drifted into his memories. “We were holding hands and running in slow motion after a rainbow,” he said softly. “It was so relaxing. Then both of us were sitting on a cloud. We were dressed in white and holding each other tightly, and we were like the cloud. Everything was so peaceful.

“There wasn’t any difference between her and I. We thought and felt alike. There were no doubts, no mistrust, no anger between us. Though we

didn't say anything to each other, we felt like living together for a million years, and then into the afterlife. Now, my heart is sore." He sighed mournfully and sank further into the driver's seat.

"There isn't any conflict between love and the highest level of responsibility," said Resman.

"No, Resman, I'm talking about love. If I could live for a thousand years, I would be happy knowing that I truly love someone. Yes, I'm feeling some guilt. I didn't tell her how much I loved her. Oh, I feel very dishonest," he moaned. "I have to tell her." He glanced at Resman.

"Finally, you're speaking my language. Responsibility is about others."

"Resman, let's leave the van at a gas station and hitchhike the rest of the way."

"I see your intention. You're doing all this for the sake of love. Remember, reality works against love."

He stopped at a gas station and left the van.